

Gravestones Destroyed by Catholic Church

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1000 Gravestones With Old Names Removed From Calvary Cemetery

Markers Being Destroyed Without Consulting Plot Owners - No Payments Made to Care for Areas

More than 1000 gravestones and monuments in Calvary Cemetery, many of them bearing the century-old names of early St. Louis settlers, have been removed from their places and are being destroyed by the administrators of the cemetery without consultation of plot owners or their representatives, the Post-Dispatch learned yesterday.

The cemetery, which covers 468 acres centering on the 5200 block of West Florissant avenue, is one of four official cemeteries of the Catholic Archdioceses of St. Louis, and is administered by the archdiocese.

The Rev. James R. Hartnett, who, as archdiocesan director of cemeteries, is directly in charge of their administration, asserted the grave markers in Calvary have been removed because the cemetery has received no payment for keeping up the plots.

The markers, together with tons of marble entrances and borders, crosses, urns and other emblems, have been pulled from the graves and stacked near the cemetery maintenance sheds. The cleaned-out areas have been graded and leveled.

Father Hartnett described the program as a combination economy and beautification" move.

"The renovating is being done in the older sections of the cemetery where very few plots are endowed with perpetual care.' Father Hartnett said. "It is financially impossible for the cemetery to assume the burden of caring for these abandoned lots with all of the monuments and markers on them. It is all we can do to keep them mowed when they are clear and level."

"Our position is that, if the markers have toppled over, the plot owners have no apparent interest in the cemetery," Father Hartnett said. "We feel we not only have a right to take them out, but that we have a duty to do so because they are unsightly, hazardous, and increase the cost of maintaining the cemetery as a whole."

Family names like Philibert, Patrick Madden, Deloughray, McCormack & Maguire, James Daneri, Marion Lynch, Husman, Mennemeyer and Fischer were a few of those dearly in view on top of the discard pile.

"We made no attempt to consult the families because it would have been impossible to trace down every one of them," Father Hartnett said. "Several notices were carried in the Catholic Register. There was ample opportunity for the plots to be fixed up. before we removed the markers."

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Grave Markers at 2nd Cemetery Removed Over Upkeep Fee Issue

More Than 500 Stones Taken Off at SS. Peter and Paul, Administered By Catholic Archdiocese.

Grave markers and monuments by the hundreds have been removed by officials of SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Cemetery, 7030 Gravois avenue, because the cemetery has not been paid for up-keep of the private lots, the Post-Dispatch learned yesterday.

The cemetery is owned and administered by the Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis. A similar removal program, as reported by the Post-Dispatch last Sunday is in progress at Calvary Cemetery, 5239 West Florissant avenue, which also is administered by the archdiocese.

An estimated 500 to 600 stones and markers have been removed at SS. Peter and Paul and the graves graded and leveled. Some graves have been left completely without identification.

The only effort to notify owners of the lots, or their families or relatives, has been through notices in the St. Louis Register, official archdiocesan newspaper. Three such notices have appeared since removal of the stones began two years ago. No attempt has been made to find or consult any individual family before removal.

Statement by Director.

Removal of the markers has been at the direction of the Rev. James R. Hartnett, who has been archdiocesan director of cemeteries for about two years. Father Hartnett described the procedure as only one part of a general "renovation and beautification" program in the older sections of the cemeteries.

Father Hartnett pointed out further that it was easier and more economical to mow level, unmarked lots than to clip around the "abandoned" gravestones, he said the cemetery could not afford to pay for the upkeep of these older, un-endowed sections unless the operation could be done cheaply. No grave markers which were in "good condition" have been removed, Father Hartnett contended, "regardless of whether or not the owner was paying for upkeep of the lot." Only those "in a truly hazardous condition" were taken, he said.

Results of Inspection

However, an inspection of the dumping grounds near the maintenance buildings of both cemeteries showed that the great majority of stones remained in reasonably good condition. Inscriptions on a great majority of the markers were either perfect or clearly legible, and were illegible on only a handful. An armed guard was placed at the 1000-stone dump at Calvary after the Post-Dispatch story appeared last Sunday, and persons since have been prohibited from inspecting the inscriptions.

One person turned away from the area was Ralph P. Bieber, professor of history at Washington University and an authority on settlers of this area in the last century. He was seeking further information on the name 'Philibert,' - which the article had quoted from one of the discarded markers. Many of the stones bear century-old names and dates.

"I have been in cemeteries of all church denominations throughout the nation, and never have I found grave markers being removed like this," said Prof. Bieber. "Much of the history of our country is recorded in the old cemeteries such as these in St. Louis."

***Today only one large stone with just the family name "PHILIBERT" remains to mark several graves in this section, with the individual grave sites now unmarked. Elizabeth Barada who was interviewed by famous writers & who is still known as 'The Mother of St. Louis' now rest in an unmarked grave in this Philibert section.